

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01 TRSE-00 HA-05 /084 W
-----122425 071758Z /45

R 071657Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8855
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USMISSION USNATO
AMCONSUL BELFAST
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 12540

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV PINT UK
SUBJECT: MURDER CHARGE SHAKES LIBERAL PARTY AND
THREATENS LABOR'S ELECTORAL PROSPECTS

SUMMARY: ON AUG 4 FORMER LIBERAL PARTY LEADER JEREMY
THORPE WAS ARRESTED AND CHARGED WITH CONSPIRACY TO
MURDER. RELEASED LATER IN THE DAY ON BAIL, THORPE HAS
SINCE INSISTED THAT HE WILL RUN IN THE PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTIONS EXPECTED IN OCTOBER, AND HAS BEEN ASKED BY
HIS LOCAL CONSTITUENCY ASSOCIATION TO DO SO. SHOULD
OCTOBER ELECTIONS BE HELD AND SHOULD THORPE RUN (AND

--
PERHAPS EVEN IF HE DOESN'T), THE AFFAIR CAN BE EXPECTED
TO HURT THE LIBERAL VOTE AND PROFIT THE CONSERVATIVES.
RUMORS EXIST OF OTHER SKELETONS CONNECTED WITH THE CASE
WHICH MIGHT BE UNCOVERED IN THE COMING MONTHS. END
SUMMARY.

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1. JEREMY THORPE WAS CHARGED LAST FRIDAY, AUG 4, WITH
CONSPIRING TO MURDER NORMAN SCOTT, A FORMER MALE MODEL
WHO CLAIMS TO HAVE HAD HOMOSEXUAL RELATIONS WITH THORPE
IN 1962, AND WHO SEEMS TO HAVE SINCE SOUGHT TO BLACKMAIL
HIM. THORPE AND THE OTHER THREE MEN CHARGED ARE ALLEGED
TO HAVE ARRANGED TO PAY A FIFTH CONSPIRATOR, ANDREW

NEWTON, TO SHOOT SCOTT IN 1976. NEWTON DID, IN FACT, SHOOT SCOTT'S GREAT DANE (FOR WHICH HE SUBSEQUENTLY WAS CONVICTED), HIS GUN ALLEGEDLY JAMMING BEFORE HE COULD DISPATCH THE DOG'S OWNER. THORPE RESIGNED FROM THE LEADERSHIP OF THE LIBERAL PARTY IN 1976 AS A RESULT OF THE PUBLICITY SURROUNDING THIS INCIDENT. HE HAS, HOWEVER, STEADFASTLY DENIED ALLEGATIONS OF EITHER CONSPIRACY, OR HOMOSEXUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH SCOTT, HAS RETAINED HIS SEAT IN PARLIAMENT, AND CONTINUED TO ACT AS THE LIBERAL PARTY'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS SPOKESMAN.

2. LIBERAL PARTY LEADERS HAD EXPECTED ARRESTS IN THIS CASE TO BE MADE SOON, AND FOR THORPE TO BE NAMED AS A WITNESS, BUT NOT AS A DEFENDANT. CHARGED ALONG WITH THORPE IS A FORMER DEPUTY TREASURER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY, AND IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED THAT LIBERAL PARTY FUNDS WERE DIVERTED TO PAY FOR THE MURDER ATTEMPT. THE LIBERAL LEADERSHIP IS UNDERSTANDABLY UPSET AT THE AUG 5 DECISION OF THORPE'S CONSTITUENCY ASSOCIATION TO SUPPORT HIM FOR REELECTION, AND THORPE'S STATEMENT OF THE SAME DAY THAT HE INTENDS TO STAND. ALTHOUGH BRITISH LAW WILL PRECLUDE MOST PRESS COMMENT ON THE SUBSTANCE OF THE CASE UNTIL THE TRIAL IS COMPLETE (THUS THROUGH AND BEYOND ANY OCTOBER ELECTION), THORPE'S DECISION TO STAND WILL, IF HE PERSISTS, ENSURE HE AND THE PARTY RECEIVE A GOOD DEAL OF PUBLICITY OF AN

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UNWELCOME SORT THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN.

3. SINCE LIBERAL VOTERS, WHEN THEY SWITCH, TEND TO SWITCH TO CONSERVATIVES, BAD NEWS FOR THE LIBERALS IS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 12540

GOOD FOR THE TORIES. FROM THE LABOR PARTY'S STANDPOINT, A DECLINE IN THE LIBERAL VOTE (WHICH POLLS INDICATE HAS IN ANY CASE WEAKENED CONSIDERABLY SINCE THE LAST GENERAL ELECTION) PREJUDICES BOTH LABOR'S CHANCE OF GAINING AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN THE COMMONS, OR OF ITS PUTTING TOGETHER ANOTHER MINORITY GOVERNMENT DEPENDENT ON LIBERAL SUPPORT FOLLOWING THE ELECTIONS.

4. THERE ARE, IN ADDITION, RUMORS OF FURTHER REVELATIONS WHICH COULD HARM LABOR. THERE HAS BEEN SPECULATION, AT LEAST IN CONSERVATIVE CIRCLES, THAT THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE DELAYED BRINGING CHARGES AGAINST THORPE AND THAT HAROLD WILSON, WHO LAST YEAR ROSE TO PUBLICLY DEFEND THORPE, MAKING AT THE TIME SOME VAGUE ALLEGATIONS OF A SOUTH AFRICAN SMEAR CAMPAIGN, MAY SOMEHOW HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN SECURING THIS DELAY. CONFIDENTIAL

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5. THORPE'S COLLEAGUES ARE NOW WORKING ON HIM IN AN EFFORT TO REVERSE HIS DECISION TO STAND FOR PARLIAMENT. SHOULD THEY FAIL, THE LIBERALS COULD WITHDRAW THE NATIONAL PARTY'S ENDORSEMENT, BUT THORPE'S LOCAL CONSTITUENCY ASSOCIATION HAS ALREADY STATED ITS WILLINGNESS TO SUPPORT HIM AS AN "INDEPENDENT" LIBERAL CANDIDATE.

6. COMMENT: THE CASE GIVES BOTH LABOR AND LIBERALS A PLAUSIBLE MOTIVE TO RENEW THE LIB-LAB PACT AND POSTPONE GENERAL ELECTIONS. IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT, HOWEVER, FOR THE LIBERAL LEADERSHIP TO MAKE SUCH AN ABOUT-FACE, HAVING TAKEN THE INITIATIVE TO TERMINATE THE PACT AND MADE SUCH A POINT OF THE NEED FOR EARLY ELECTIONS. IF

THORPE AGREES TO STAND DOWN, THE WHOLE AFFAIR COULD
SUBMERGE UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTIONS. IF NOT, AND IF
THERE TURNS OUT TO BE ANYTHING BEHIND THE VAGUE RUMORS
OF A "COVER UP," THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF THIS AFFAIR
COULD SPREAD MUCH FURTHER.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MURDER, LABOR, PARTY LEADERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 07 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LONDON12540
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780323-0019
Format: TEL
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780892/aaaaczhs.tel
Line Count: 177
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 8f6d9a67-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1820970
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MURDER CHARGE SHAKES LIBERAL PARTY AND THREATENS LABOR\`S ELECTORAL PROSPECTS SUMMARY: ON AUG 4 FORMER LIBERAL PARTY LEADER JER
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UK
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/8f6d9a67-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014